

Robert M. Lee House and Law Office  
109-111 North Sixth Street  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1052

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
251-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROBERT M. LEE HOUSE AND LAW OFFICE

HABS No. PA-1052 HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA  
251-

Street Address: 109-111 North Sixth Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Demolished July 1959, for extension of the Independence Mall.

Brief Statement of Significance: An example of the brick Philadelphia row house, differing in that it was two lots wide. The second floor room, with its two niches, acroteria-crowned door and window trim and two rectangular ceiling ornaments, was a fine example of Greek Revival interior treatment.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: This house stood on land, part of a "Great Lot of Ground," granted to Gabriel Wilkinson by Richard Hill, Isaac Norris, and James Logan, "Commissioners of William Penn Esqr." by letters patent, dated March 10, 1715/16 / Patent Book A, No. 5, p. 413: All Property Transactions Cited From City Records of Philadelphia/. On December 22, 1769, the lot, 34' x 74', was transferred from Wilkinson's heirs to Jacob Chrystler, "Taylor," for L82 / Deed Book I, No. 7, p. 74/. Later deeds mention that "Christler / sic /... built...two certain brick Messuages each about Seventeen feet front on Sixth Street" / Deed Book E. F., No. 14, p. 333/, and that "Jacob Chrystler Erected two Brick Messuages or tenaments on said...Lot and departed this life...about the month of March...", 1774 / Deed Book I. C., No. 20, p. 175/. These were, apparently, the first buildings erected on the property.

Chrystler died intestate and, in a tripartite indenture of 1803, his heirs agreed that the northern one-half of the lot (17' x 34', with house) should be sold. The southern one-half was transferred to John Phile, Grocer, and his wife, Phebe / sic /, an heir of Chrystler. The northern half was sold to John Chamberlain, Grocer, for \$1600 in 1811 / Ibid./, and in 1814 passed to Charles Marquedant, Merchant, for \$2000 / Deed Book I. C., No. 29, p. 399/.

Within two months Marquedant transferred his northern one-half of the property, described as a "Certain brick tenement and Lot" / Deed Book M. R., No. 1, p. 59/ to Samuel Baker, "House Carpenter," for one dollar plus "convenants and agreements". These latter were, first, that the property would be "forever" subject to a yearly ground rent of 136 "silver milled dollars lawful money of the United States of America each dollar

weighing Seventeen penny weights and Six grains at least", and, second, that Baker must "within one year from the date hereof / that is, by May, 1815 / Erect and Build on the said... lot Brick Buildings sufficient to secure the said yearly rent" / Ibid. /. The southern one-half of the property remained with John Phile until March, 1817, when it was transferred to Samuel Fox, Brickmaker, for \$2000 / Deed Book M. R., No. 16, p. 513 / who in turn deeded it to Samuel Baker in August for the same sum / Ibid., p. 515 /. That Baker fulfilled his agreements with Marquedant is certain, since he retained possession of the property. But exactly what he built is not clear. In 1826 he sold the property, described as a "certain three story Brick Messuage or Tenament and lot", 17' x 74', plus a lot, 17' x 74', bounded on the north "by the above described Messuage and lot", to Robert S. Stephans for \$5000. / Deed Book G. W. R., No. 14, p. 569 /. In 1832, Stephans renounced this deed and returned the property to Baker's widow and family for one dollar / Deed Book A.M., No. 30, p. 32 /.

In 1838 Robert S. Stephans, listed as a "Gentleman and Guardian of Elizabeth Jane Baker" (Samuel Baker's daughter) sold, at public sale for \$1500, her one-third interest in the property to Robert M. Lee. / Deed Book S.H.F., No. 25, p. 625 /. Lee had acquired another one-third through his marriage, before 1832, to Elizabeth's sister, Matilda Emma Baker. He acquired the final one-third by deed from Robert S. Baker, his brother-in-law, for \$1500 in 1839 / Deed Book G.S., No. 6, p. 198 /.

Robert M. Lee (1805-1863) was the longest and most distinguished occupant or owner of the house. It is also believed that its remodeling into the Greek Revival style was done by him. It was his home and office from circa 1835-36 / See Philadelphia Directories for these years /, when the house address was 49 North Sixth, until shortly before his death in 1863. Lee was born in Philadelphia and worked as a tailor at C. C. Watson and Sons, 92 Chestnut Street / Souder's History of Chestnut Street (1860), Vol. 1, p. 68, Historical Society of Pennsylvania / until admitted to the practice of law on May 25, 1829 / John H. Martin, Bench and Bar of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1883, p. 286 /). By 1830 he was commander of the Volunteer Corps of Union Fencibles, a city militia, a position he held until after 1845 / Humphreys to Bonsall, May 11, 1830, and Lee to John Cadwalader, February 22, 1845 (MS Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania) /.

On May 18, 1847, he was appointed Recorder of the City of Philadelphia, retaining this position until 1858 / Martin, op. cit., p. 97 /. On July 28, 1862, Lee was commissioned a

Major and Paymaster in the regular army / T. H. S. Hamersly, Ed. Complete Regular Army Register...., (Washington, 1880) p. 64/, and later rose to Lieutenant-Colonel in the 81st Infantry Regiment (Philadelphia) / Frank H. Taylor, Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-65, (Philadelphia, 1913), p. 284/. But his service was short lived, probably because of ill health. He died in New York, after leaving service, on September 21, 1863.

The North American and United States Gazette (Philadelphia) for September 22 carried the following obituary:

"Everyone of our readers will be sorry to learn of the death of Robert M. Lee of this city. Mr. Lee had given two gallant sons to his country. He had been appointed paymaster in the army, stationed at New York. He fell dead yesterday from disease of the heart, at his boarding house in that city, and his remains arrived here last night. He was eminently loyal, and in all the relations of his life bore a reputation of excellence."

An inventory of the house at this time is given below.

In 1867, Richard Washington, son-in-law and attorney for Robert M. Lee, deceased, sold the property, described as a "three story double Brick messuage and Lot" to John Duress O'Bryan for \$10,000 at public sale. The property was still subject to a yearly ground rent of \$136 payable to Charles Marquendant / Deed Book J.T.O., No. 48, p. 303/. It should be noted that this deed is the first to mention a double messuage. With the transfer of the property to O'Bryan, the building began its long but steady decline into its slum condition at the time of removal. The following is a brief list of transfers after 1867:

- A. O'Bryan to Wm. L. Hirsh (June 9, 1873)
- B. O'Bryan to Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (April 11, 1904)
- C. Philadelphia Savings Fund Society to Fannie Ginsburg (September 29, 1904)
- D. Ginsburg to Frederick H. Starling (December 14, 1904)
- E. Starling to Margaret Ennis (April 9, 1920)
- F. Ennis to Issac Dluge (April 9, 1920)
- G. Dluge to Barney A. Friedman (April 9, 1920)
- H. Friedman to Frederick H. Starling, Jr. (April 15, 1930)
- I. Starling, Jr. to Frederick H. Starling (November 29, 1946)
- J. Starling (Jr.) to General State Authority (August 21, 1958) for \$18,000.

2. Date of erection: Originally constructed as two houses, 1769-1774. Extensively remodeled into one house ca. 1840.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers etc.: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction etc.: The first construction on this site occurred between 1769 and 1774 when Jacob Chrystler erected two brick houses, each seventeen feet wide. In the absence of any contrary data, it is assumed that these two houses, with undetermined additions or alterations between 1814 and 1826 by Samuel Baker, were transferred to Robert M. Lee by 1839. The plans of the original houses are unknown.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Internal evidence, examined at the demolition of the house suggested that the two houses were remodeled into one "double" house by Robert M. Lee who acquired full control of the property in 1839. The ceiling plaster of the remodeled southern half of the second floor was held by sawn lath, (thought to have been introduced into Philadelphia circa 1840) while that of the northern half was held by riven lath. It is possible that the entire front wall was rebuilt at this time, and the dormers can probably be assigned to this remodeling also.

The first floor store front was added after 1870.

The house was removed in July 1959, as part of the demolition of the entire block for the extension of the Independence Mall.

6. Important old views and references  
Views: North East corner of Sixth and Arch Streets, circa 1870 (included in this survey). Original in the Castner Collection (Vol. 26, p. 5), Print Room, Free Library of Philadelphia, Logan Square.
- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: None of importance.
- C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Insurance surveys of Fire Insurance Companies other than the Mutual Assurance Co. and the Philadelphia Contributionship.
- D. Supplemental Material: The following is quoted from the "Appraisement in the Estate of R M Lee Deceased," filed October 22, 1863: / Register of Wills, City of Philadelphia, Will 400, 1863\_/ . Items relating to other property are omitted.

A true and perfect inventory and just appraisement of all and singular the goods and chattels, rights and credits which were of

Robert M Lee, late of the City of Philadelphia, and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Lawyer, deceased, at the time of his death, to wit:

---

House No	Front Office	
109 Nth 6th	1 Large Mahog. Book Case	5 00
	1 Small " " "	2 00
	1 Office Desk	1 00
	1 Small "	1 00
	1 Hat Rack	2 00
	1 Book Stand	1 00
	1 Stove	2 00
	6 Pictures & Frames	2 00
	5 Chairs 1 Stool & 1 Step ladder & 1 umbrella	1 00
	Stand	
	Carpet	1 00
Back Office	1 Lounge	3 00
	1 Office Desk	4 00
	1 Book Case	6 00
	1 Stove	2 00
	19 Pictures & Frames	5 00
	1 Hat Rack	1 50
	5 Chairs	1 00
	Carpet	1 00
	3 Plaster Busts	50
Parlor	1 Bedstead	15 00
	1 Wardrobe	20 00
	2 Mirrors	60 00

	4 Blinds	5 00
	2 Velvet Arm Chairs	10 00
	7 Mahog Chairs	7 00
	Amo Carried For <sup>d</sup>	159 00
	Amo. Brot. Ford.	159 00
Parlor Cont:	1 Brocatelle Lounge	5 00
"	2 Spring Seat "	12 00
	2 Small "	10 00
	1 Marble top Table	6 00
	1 Office Table	4 00
	1 Chess "	1 00
	1 Set tea "	1 00
	Carpet	8 00
	14 Pictures & Frames	5 00
	1 Vase	1 00
	3 Mattresses, 1 Feather Bed & Bed Clothes	10 00
	4 Alabaster Ornaments	2 00
	1 Rocking chair & Towel Rack	1 00
	2 Chandaliers	8 00
2d Story	1 Side Board	15 00
dining Room	1 Mirror	2 50
Entry	1 Blind	75
2d Story Front	1 Mirror	6 00
	1 Chandelier	4 00
	1 Oil Painting	3 00
	1 Bracket & Slab	1 00

Entry 1st & 2d Stories	Oil Cloth	2 50
3d Story Front North	2 Blinds	1 50
	1 Bedstead	1 50
3d Story Front	2 Blinds	1 50
South	1 Bedstead	2 00
	1 Bureau	2 00
	1 Wash Stand	25
Entry 3d	Oilcloth	25
3d Back	1 Bureau	1 50
	3 Cane Seat Chairs	2 00
	Amo. Carried For <sup>d</sup>	279 00
4th Front	Amo. Brot. Ford.	279 00
South	1 Camp Bedstead	1 00
North	1 Bedstead	1 00
3d Back ) ( building )	1 Enclosed Wash Stand	1 00
	1 Stove	1 00
Room over kitch.	1 Mirror	1 50
Dining room 1st floor	3 Shades	50
	Oil cloth	1 00
4th Back	1 Bureau	5 00
	1 "	1 50
	1 Wash Stand	1 00
	1 Stove	3 00
	2 Blinds	1 00
	Oilcloth & Zinc	50
	1 Picture	25



Closet	China	5 00
"	Wearing Apparel	50 00
Kitchen	2 Extension Tables	2 00
. . . . .		
Philadelphia	Law library	300 00
109 Nth 6th st	4 Trunks	8 00
Total, including items omitted		992 00

Taken and appraised by us the Ninth day of October A. D.

one thousand eight Hundred and Sixty three

F. W. Mintzer  
H. H. Kline

Prepared by James F. O'Gorman - August 1959  
Architect, National Park Service

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: Probably originally built as two narrow brick row houses, later altered into a "double" house. The original character was lost with this alteration to the Greek Revival style.
2. Condition of Fabric: One of a group of buildings pulled down for the extension of the Independence Mall (July, 1959)

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Three and one-half stories; approximately 34' x 38' plus back-buildings.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Brick; Front. (west) facade of Flemish Bond.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: None.
5. Chimneys: Plain brick chimneys located at party walls, two on south, one on north. Photo c. 1870 shows pointed, brick arch caps.

6. Openings

- a. Doorways and doors: Ground floor extensively altered for shops after 1870.
- b. Windows and shutters: 6 over 6 light, double hung windows, with stone sills; photograph c. 1870 shows exterior, louvered shutters on all windows. Large plate glass shop windows on ground floor.

7. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Rafter-framed gable roof originally covered with wood shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed wood cornice across front elevation.
- c. Dormers, cupolas: Two gable-roofed and pedimented dormers face west, one faces east. Two 4 over 4 light, double-hung windows per dormer.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

1. Floor Plans: 1st floor - (original condition unknown). Two shops separated by L-shaped hall. Stairway at north party wall. Two rooms in backbuildings. 2nd floor - One L-shaped room and stairhall. Long narrow room in backbuilding. 3rd floor - Three rooms open onto stairhall. Long narrow room in backbuilding. Garret not examined.
2. Stairways: One circular ended turn-back stair. Turned balusters support hand rail.
3. Flooring: Second floor - Random width boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: (second floor only) - Plaster averaged 1 1/2" thick on walls, first paint color was a blue-grey (ceiling not checked). Plaster ceiling with circular, plaster center-piece of simple design in stairhall, two rectangular, foliage pattern, plaster center-pieces surrounded by recessed panel edged with tongue and dart motif, in main room. Coved, plaster cornice in main room with tongue and dart, and egg and dart, ornament.
5. Doorways and doors: Single panel door of heavy construction on second floor. Simple profile on stairhall side; tongue and dart ornament on interior.
6. Trim (Second floor only): Stairhall and north portion of main room: door and window frames of wood "pilaster trim" (symmetrical profile) with coved wood cornices over opening.

South portion of main room: trim was Greek Revival with wide base board of simple profile, plain wood pilasters at door and windows and under boxed wood beam, and flat carved capitals, and coved wood cornice. Tongue and dart ornament on cornices crowned with carved wood acroteria. Wood paneling of simple profile beneath windows. First layer of paint on all trim in this area is a cream color.

7. Hardware: None of interest.
8. Lighting: Electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Fireplaces at party wall in all main rooms; 1863 inventory indicates use of stoves.  
Second floor - Fireplace on north party wall. Remains of a black marble frame and one breast closet.  
West niche on south party wall was originally a fireplace, as indicated by outline of hearth on floor and blackened bricks on interior. (East niche not examined). Probably ca. 1840, a circular brick and plaster niche and marble base were built in. The marble base of west niche contains a hot air duct, opening in front, leading to flue from fireplace on floor below.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: House faces west and is one of a group of row houses on the east side of Sixth Street.
2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks, driveways etc.: None.
5. Landscaping, gardens etc.: None.

Prepared by James F. O'Gorman - August 1959  
Architect, National Park Service

E. Woodwork Preserved after Demolition:

1. One set of window trim in the Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, September, 1959.
2. One door with trim, one set of window trim, and one hot air register grill in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., August, 1960.

Prepared by James C. Massey - December 1960  
Architect, National Park Service